A Comparison between

A Sincere Penitent, and a Just Person;

IN A

SERMON

Preached before the

QUEEN,

At Whitehall, *March* 8 $169\frac{2}{3}$.

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Published by Her Majesty's special Command.

LONDON,
Printed for *W. Crooke*, at the *Green Dragon* without *Temple-Barr*; and *S. Smith*, at the *Princes-Arms* in St. *Paul's Church-Yard*. MDCXCIII.

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Dr. *MANNINGHAM's*

COMPARISON

BETWEEN

A Sincere Penitent, and a Juſt Perſon.

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St. Luke, Chap XV. Verſ. 7.

I ſay unto you, That likewiſe Joy ſhall be in Heaven over one Sinner that Repenteth, more than over ninety and nine juſt Perſons which need no Repentance.

THis being the moſt ſolemn Time of the Year, wherein the Doctrine of Repentance ought to be more abundantly preach'd, and more frequently inculcated, and wherein all the variety of Motives and Arguments is to be made uſe of, to bring Men to a ſerious Conſideration of their Ways and Lives, to a juſt Abhorrence of their Sins, and to a ſpiritual Recovery of Themſelves; I ſhall endeavour at preſent to explain this Portion of Scripture, and to enlarge on its Particulars in ſuch a manner, as may give encouragement to the greateſt of Sinners to repent, and yet ſecure the Dignity and Preference of thoſe juſt and vertuous Perſons, who need no ſuch extraordinary Repentance: That the moſt Vicious and Extravagant may be

invited to turn to God, and the Devout and Humble to go on more cheerfully in their progreſs to Perfection: That Converſion and Repentance may be duly magnified, and yet without any Derogation from the greater Excellency of an habitual Innocence, of an early and conſtant courſe in Piety. And in order to this, I ſhall proceed in this following method:

I. I ſhall conſider what is meant by thoſe Juſt Perſons who need no Repentance.

II. How we are to underſtand that Joy in Heaven over one Sinner that repenteth, *&c.*

III. I ſhall make ſome compariſon between a True Penitent and a Juſt Perſon; and ſhew on which ſide the Advantage lies.

I. What is meant by thoſe Juſt Perſons who need no Repentance.

In the beginning of this Chapter, it is ſaid, That the *Publicans and Sinners drew near to hear our Saviour; and that the Phariſees and Scribes murmured, ſaying, This Man receiveth Sinners, and eateth with them*: And upon this account ſome are of Opinion, that the three following Parables were ſpoken with a particular reflection on thoſe conceited and preſumptuous Perſons, who thought none were Juſt and Holy, or had any Title to Heaven but them.

themſelves; and who plac'd a main part of their Sanctimonioufneſs in a ſeparation from others, and in deſpiſing of poor Publicans and Sinners. But tho' the Pride and Hypocriſie of thoſe Perſons were moſt vile and abominable, and fully merited all the Severity of our Saviour's Reproofs; and tho' he took many occaſions of diſcovering to the People the Falſeneſs, Covetouſneſs, Cenſoriouſneſs, and Malice, of that pretending Sect; yet he does not ſeem in theſe Parables to have reflected on Them: For here the principal Deſign of our Saviour was, to ſet forth the Goodneſs of GOD, and his readineſs to forgive the greateſt Sinners, upon their timely and ſincere Repentance; and to declare the Pleaſure which His Heavenly Father took in the Converſion of Men, tho' they had been very extravagantly ſinful. But now what ſort of Expreſſion had it been of God's Delight in true Penitents, if this had been the proper ſignification of the Text, That there was Joy in Heaven over one Sinner that repented, more than over ninety and nine hypocritical Phariſees, who were ſo proud as to think they needed no Repentance? To be ſure, this could not be the ſence intended by our Saviour; becauſe the deſign of the Parables which he then deliver'd, was to magnifie the Graciouſneſs and Mercy of God towards hearty Peni-

tents; but nothing ſurely could be a more improper way of doing that, than by preferring of them barely before the worſt of Hyprocrites.

As to the number of Ninety nine Juſt Perſons, that runs upon a ſuppoſition; that ſhould we conceive ſo many Juſt Perſons, who lived ſober and regular Lives, and that but one in an hundred ſhould prove Extravagant; the reducing of that one would be the cauſe of more Joy, than the continuance of Ninety nine in their wonted Obedience and Duty. But tho' the number of Ninety nine Juſt Perſons in an Hundred, be a Suppoſition, yet it may be further enquir'd, Whether there be any Perſons ſo Juſt as to need no Repentance? And to this it may be anſwer'd, 1*ſt*. That there is a Spirit of Deluſion gone into the World, whereby ſome are fill'd with ſuch preſumptuous Conceits of themſelves, that they dare pretend to an abſolute unſinning Perfection: And this makes them deſpiſe the ſolemn Confeſſions of Sin, and the Sacraments of the Church; and is ſo dangerous a piece of ſpiritual Pride, that it delivers Men up to blaſphemous Opinions, and ſuch diſtractions of Mind that look very like unto real Poſſeſſions. When the Devil cannot prevail with ſome to run into the Diſorders of a ſenſual Life, then he endeavours to raiſe them up into his own Nature:

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If they cannot be prevail'd upon to be groſly ſinful, then he perſwades them that they have no Sin at all; that they are wholly pure and perfect, and ſtand in no need of thoſe Cleanſings and Expiations, which others look upon as neceſſary and conſtant Duties: That Confeſſion, Humiliation, Repentance, and applying to the Sacrifice of Chriſt, are but mean Ordinances and Beggarly Elements, fit only to conſtitute the Religion of great Sinners: And that they are already advanc'd to ſuch a near conformity with God, that they want none of thoſe helps and ſupplies which are ſuited only to an imperfect State.

This may look like a ſtrange Deſcription to thoſe who are not acquainted with the Wiles and Depths of Satan, and with that Myſtery of Ungodlineſs which works in the Children of Pride: But 'tis a ſad Truth, that there have been many, who have been wrought up into Spiritual Phrenzies, by entertaining unuſual confidences of their own perfection; by neglecting the humble way of Walking with God in conſtant Piety and Fear; in a mean opinion of their own good Actions; in the Prayers and Praiſes of the Church, and under the wiſe and ſober Conduct of thoſe who are appointed by God to watch over the Souls of Men. It is a Melancholy reflexion

flexion to think how many of those poor Creatures who talk of nothing but Spirit, and Light, and Communion with God, are at the same time in the very Gall of Bitterness, and in the height of Spiritual Pride! Now such as these are so far from needing no Repentance, that they want it as much as the most Debauch'd and Profligate Sinner; and nothing is more proper for such, than to spend the whole remainder of their days in mourning and debasing of themselves, and in using the best methods of cleansing themselves from the abominable pollutions of Pride, and from the filthiness of the Spirit.

2. There are others, who tho' they do not rise unto that degree of Spiritual Pride, as those I now mentioned; yet because they are not observ'd to run into the notorious Riots and Excesses of the Age, are inclin'd to think, That the Doctrine of Repentance does but little concern them. They are not so open and publick in their Sins as others; the noise of their Sinful Actions does not furnish the Discourse of People, and the Scene of their Vices lies more inward and retired; but yet all the while their Hearts may be full of Covetousness, Vain-glory, and bitter Zeal; they may never yet have had any spiritual Change and Renovation within them; and they may be very remote from true Godliness, and a sincere love of

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Vertue: And if there be ſuch as theſe, they ſtand in as much need of Repentance as any of the Prodigal and Licentious part of Mankind. But then,

3*ly*. There are ſome ſuch juſt Perſons as need no ſuch Repentance as the Prodigal Son is repreſented to have made: They do not need a whole change of their Hearts and Lives, becauſe they are ſuch as thro' a good Education, and an early Piety, have been kept under the Grace and Providence of God, from breaking out into any Notorious Sins, and from living in any Habitual filthineſs either of Fleſh or Spirit. But yet even theſe ſtand in need of ſuch a Repentance, as ought to run parallel with all their Vertuous Actions to the end of their Days; which is to accompany them in their higheſt Attainments, and to ſend them humbly to the Blood of Chriſt, for the expiating the Defects of their moſt perfect Lives. When we talk of Innocent and Juſt Perſons, we always mean in a comparative way of ſpeaking, as they excell the generality of Mankind, and are more Conſtant and Zealous in Holy Duties, than others. When we ſpeak of *Perfection*, we take that word in an Evangelical ſence, not according to the rigour and abſoluteneſs of the Term; but in ſuch a qualified meaning, as is conſiſtent with Surprizes and Infirmities: We mean ſuch a perfection

fection as includes many defects in it, but yet is ſtill carrying us on to farther degrees of Holineſs: That leaves us continual matter for our Humiliation, and for our farther endeavours after Righteouſneſs; but does not ſuffer any Sin to Reign and have Dominion over us.

Now there were ſome in our Saviour's time, even in that moſt degenerate State of *Judaiſm*, who were ſo juſt and perfect, as to need no ſuch Repentance as *John the Baptiſt* preached to the *Phariſees* and *Sadducees*, and our Saviour himſelf to the *Publicans* and *Sinners*: There were ſome true *Iſraelites*, who had lived without Guile, and had kept a good Conſcience both towards God and Man: And as to ſuch, it was ſufficient that they received Chriſt as the *Meſſiah*, whom the Prophets had foretold, without condemning themſelves for their former opinions, or for their former Lives; they being already Believers and Virtuous, according to the light, and knowledge, and means they were under, were only to be inſtructed farther in the Myſteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, to be more confirm'd in the Comfortable Doctrine of the forgiveneſs of Sins, and to be improv'd and raiſed unto more *perfection*, to higher Inſtances of Duty, and greater degrees of Love: But they had no need of thoſe aſtoniſhing Sermons, and thoſe terrible denunciations of

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preſent Wrath and Deſtruction, which were to awake the Groſſer Sinners; nor were they oblig'd to enter into thoſe difficult and bitter parts of Repentance, which were deſign'd for the Recovery of thoſe who were Dead in Treſpaſſes and Sins.

So likewiſe under the ſetled profeſſion of the Goſpel, there are thoſe, who by the preventing Grace of God, have been preſerved from the Corruptions of the World; and by the means of a pious Education, and a governable Temper, have maintain'd an even and conſtant courſe of Piety: Now it cannot be ſuppos'd that ſuch Perſons as theſe, need any ſuch Repentance as ſignifies a Total Change of their Hearts and Manners: The Holy Spirit has already wrought that change which was neceſſary for them in an inſenſible way, and by ſuch undiſcernible degrees, that they cannot aſſign the particular time of their Converſion. The Baptiſmal Efficacy unfolded itſelf into ſanctification, and holineſs as they were capable and fit, and their Chriſtianity and Reaſon improv'd together.

But ſtill there is a Repentance for ſuch as theſe to be imploy'd in, while they ſojourn in this World; for tho' they avoid all known and willful Sins, and diſcharge their duties in ſuch a manner, that their Conſciences cannot ac-

cuſe them of any groſs neglect, or of any Inſincerity of Heart; yet evil Thoughts, irregular Deſires, diſorderly Paſſions upon ſudden Provocations, and an omiſſion of the due execution of good Purpoſes, and of the improvement of good Affections, are breaches of God's Holy Law, and need his Pardon: They muſt be reſiſted and watch'd againſt; and they muſt be cleans'd by ſuch a Repentance, as makes Men truly ſorrowful for ſuch impure Adherencies, tho' perhaps they ſhall never be perfectly free from them; by ſuch a Repentance, as makes them groan and mourn under them as burdenſome Infirmitites, and ready to comply with the beſt methods of removing them in ſome meaſure and degree; for tho' we cannot be perfectly Holy in this Life, yet we don't know to what a heighth of Piety we may arrive, unleſs we try and contend after it; and tho' we miſs of ſome of thoſe degrees of Perfection which we labour'd to attain, yet we ſhall find ſuch Advantages in our ſpiritual Life, by our hearty Endeavours to be quit of all Infirmities, that we ſhall be more confirm'd in Goodneſs, perceive our Hearts and Affections more and more purify'd, and we ſhall be prepared for a higher ſtate of Glory.

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Thus we ſee that there is a Repentance for the moſt Juſt and Righteous Perſons continually to be exercis'd in; but then this Repentance is not ſo much a ſeparate Duty, or an entrance upon Religion, as a continuance in it, or a walking humbly with God: 'Tis not a paſſing from a courſe of Sin, to an habit of Righteouſneſs, but a proficiency in Holineſs under a fear of God, and a mournful ſenſe of our Infirmities and Defects: And tho' this be continually carried on in ſome degree all the time of our Lives, yet it muſt be increas'd as ſolemn Occaſions ſhall require. And tho' the Repentance of great Sinners may cauſe more *Joy* in Heaven, yet I doubt not but this Repentance of the Juſt is of exceeding *Eſteem* with God and his Holy Angels. Which leads to the

Second thing to be explain'd, *viz.* How we are to underſtand that Joy in Heaven over one Sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine Juſt Perſons which need no Repentance. Now 'tis evident that this expreſſion of *Joy in Heaven*, is ſuited to the plain matter of the Parable; for if it be natural for a Shepherd to rejoyce more at the finding of a Sheep that had ſtraggled away from its Fellows, and was given over for loſt, than for all the remaining Body of the Flock, which he knew to be ſafe, and within the Fold:

If this be a common Obſervation, and agreeable to the Nature and ordinary Concerns of Mankind, who are generally more mov'd with ſomething that ſurprizes, and is unexpected, than with what is known and conſtant, tho' really in it ſelf of greater value than the other; then we have a ſufficient underſtanding of what our Saviour means by that Expreſſion, when we apply it to ſpiritual matters, in that manner that ſpiritual things will admit of.

That therefore which we are to conceive by that Phraſe, of *Joy in Heaven over one Sinner which repenteth*, &c. is this: That the Converſion of a Sinner is highly acceptable to God; and that a true Penitent is very dear to Him, and to the miniſtring Angels. But whether there be ſuch a thing as *Joy* in *Spiritual Natures*, and how any thing like a Surprize may be conſiſtent with thoſe Intelligent Beings, is no part of ſolid Divinity, and we may be wiſe and holy, without reſolving of thoſe Intricacies.

We know that the whole Scheme of the Scriptures, is founded upon God's Pity and Compaſſion to Man; and that it is God the *Son* who tranſacts all things between the Father and us: And he having taken *our Nature* upon Him, in the fulneſs of time; which he covenanted to do, before the foundation of the World; I cannot ſee

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any ſuch Impropriety in the Style and Language of the Scriptures, as ſome may imagine, when they Attribute ſome kind of Affections to God, as He is conſider'd and repreſented to us under the Notion of the *Meſſiah*: For what unſuitableneſs is there, that a God Incarnate, or a God taking Humane Nature upon Him, ſhould repreſent himſelf as cloathed with the original and innocent Inclinations and Affections of that Humane Nature he was pleaſed to aſſume? All the Deſcriptions of God which we meet with in our Bible, are either very Majeſtical, and ſuch as are proper to imprint on our Minds an exceeding Reverence and Awe of his Glorious Nature; or they are very Gracious and Lovely, apt to take poſſeſſion of our whole Hearts, and to call forth all our Gratitude; we find none of the evil Paſſions, or ſuch as have an immediate repugnancy to a Good and Wiſe Being, ever attributed to God in the Phraſe of the Scriptures; but only ſuch Paſſions as are Vertues and Perfections too, and ſuch as become a Juſt and Wiſe Governour, or a Prudent and Tender Father.

The generality of Mankind are hardly able to conceive the Actions of God's Nature, any otherwiſe than in a very Humane way: And when they find Religious Matters repreſented according to the beſt conceptions they have of Wiſdom and Good-

Goodneſs, they reſt contented; and as the Integrity of their Hearts, and the Honeſty of their deſigns ſhall diſpoſe them, they apply themſelves to Practice and Obedience. Now the Scriptures were written for the generality of Men, and for the meaneſt Capacities, and in ſuch a way of condeſcention as was likelieſt to work upon the Moſt: And they who are of finer Thoughts, and nicer Enquiries, have other ways of ſatisfying themſelves.

The expreſſion therefore of *Joy in Heaven over a Sinner that repents*, is deſign'd to enlarge our Apprehenſions of God's Goodneſs, to raiſe our admiration of his Mercy, and to encourage the greateſt Sinners to return to Vertue: But if we will be asking queſtions about the operation of Natures that are ſo far above us, and be diſputing the propriety of Expreſſions; we ſhall go near to loſe the main intent of the Parable, and to forget that one thing neceſſary; the ſalvation of our Souls.

I come therefore to the *Third* thing I propoſed, To make ſome Compariſon between a True Penitent, and a Juſt Perſon; between one Converted from a Vitious Courſe of Life, and a Perſon conſtantly and habitually Good, brought up in an early Piety, and

and going on to Perfection, in an even and ſteady progreſs.

Now it is certain, that both theſe Perſons, and both theſe States are highly commendable: And tho' the penitent Perſon in ſome reſpects may have the advantage of the Juſt; yet the Juſt will have the advantage of him in more.

It is a glorious thing to be a ſincere Convert, to chooſe Vertue with true knowledge and deliberation; to renounce the World upon a full conviction of its Vanity; to preferr Humiliation and Retirement before Feaſting and Laughter, and the wiſdom of Religion before all the pleaſures of Sin! Such a preferrence as this, brings an exceeding honour to the Goſpel, by making known to others the greatneſs of its force and efficacy, and that it is moſt eminently the Power of God to Salvation: For what a weight muſt thoſe Motives carry with them, that can break thorow the ſtrongeſt habits of Vice, and caſt down thoſe evil Imaginations that have mightily exalted themſelves againſt the knowledge of Chriſt, and have been fortified by long and repeated Cuſtom? What a ſudden Confuſion muſt it bring to the Kingdom of Darkneſs, when ſuch a Perſon is brought over to Vertue, who was acquainted with many of the Depths and Myſteries of that Infernal Court, and who

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can now discover to others the Wiles and Arts by which the Empire of Sin is upheld and promoted? What an addition must it be to the native Honours and Reverence of an Holy Life, when he who has experienc'd and made a full tryal of that false Happiness which sinful Pleasures boast of, shall confess and deplore the Delusions, Anxieties, and Horrors of a Vitious conversation, and beg contentment from Religion? What new love of Vertue, and greater detestation of Sin must it cause in us, when we find one who was notorious for a prophane Life, bitterly bewailing the many scoffs and derisions which he had formerly cast upon Holy Things and Persons, and with the deepest sence of his vile and unworthy Actions, imploring the Absolution of the Church? What a joy must this be to the Angels in Heaven, what a triumph to the Saints on Earth? How gladly will those Ministring Spirits be imploy'd to carry up to Heaven the Contrition of his Repentance, the sincerity of his Vows, and the fervour of his Prayers? And how joyfully will they return with the message of Pardon, Comfort and Salvation? With what Demonstrations of friendship and gladness will such a Person be received into the Communion of Saints here below? They will assist him in the difficulties

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of his new Undertaking, abate the perplexity of his mind with ſeaſonable Counſels, and meekly watch over his tender and ſcrupulous Piety: They will never upbraid him for his former Actions, nor deſpiſe him for what he once was; but will magnify that Grace which over-power'd the ſtrong Holds of Sin, and only repine, That he was not ſooner Theirs.

As the return of a Sinner from a Vitious Life brings great Glory to God, and to the Goſpel of Chriſt; ſo there are ſome Vertues, or ſome peculiarities of Holineſs, in which true Penitents do often excell. There is generally an excellent degree of Humility that accompanies all their Pious Duties, and nothing uſually is more contrary to their Tempers than Spiritual Pride. They are ſeldom guilty of any Cenſoriouſneſs, or deſpiſing of others, who are not yet return'd to Wiſdom, and a better Mind; who are not yet ſo Vertuous and ſo Happy as themſelves. They are always ſenſible of what they once were, and moſt zealous for the converſion of others; as knowing on what terrible Precipices they continually walk. Beſides, they oftentimes arrive to an exceeding meaſure of Divine Love; that Heat, that Vehemency of Temper which once carried them into the Exceſſes of Sin and Folly, being conſecrated to God

and Religion, is for the future turn'd into the Ardors of Devotion.

If these with many more Advantages of Repentance were well weigh'd, there is sufficient encouragement for the greatest Sinners to come in, to enter their Names among the happy Penitents, and by their timely Conversion, to cause great Joy in Heaven. But then we are likewise to consider, that the Joy which is expres'd for a Convert, is no Derogation from the just Person, who needs no such difficult, no such bitter Repentance.

It is well indeed for thousands of us, that there are such privileges in the Gospel for returning Prodigals; and that God has so signally declar'd his readiness to forgive us upon our sincere repentance: But yet the advantage lies on the other side, in being early engag'd in the ways of Vertue. A religious Education is certainly the greatest Blessing in this World; tis the foundation of all others; 'tis that which delivers us over to the especial care of God, and puts us into the very Road of a happy Predestination, which nothing but a prodigious perverseness of Nature can break through. But then we must not look upon *Religious Education* as a thing that can be so soon finish'd as some imagine; if we would have it effectual, it will ask a considerable time in perfecting; for it does not consist in saying a Catechism

techiſm by rote, or in ſtanding a little in awe of Parents; much leſs in learning ſome unneceſſary accompliſhments; but in awakening the faculties and ſecret powers of the Soul, as ſoon as may be; in working of good habits into thoſe powers, and making the diſtinctions between Good and Evil very plain and manifeſt; in enabling young Perſons to form a rational choice of Vertue, and bringing them by degrees to find a delight in Religious Duties: To be ſure they muſt never be truſted to their own Conduct, 'till they are arriv'd to ſome moral Wiſdom, and to ſome ſpiritual Strength, and are in ſome meaſure prepar'd to withſtand thoſe Temptations of the World, which are moſt likely to aſſault them. This, ſome will ſay, is a difficult Task, an imployment much out of Faſhion, and few Parents care to have ſo much trouble with their Children; this I grant is too true; but then this is the ſourſe of thoſe Numbers and Swarms of the extravagantly Vitious which darken this Age; that the Suppoſition of the Parable may be revers'd upon us, who have ninety nine Sinners, for one juſt Perſon, who needs no ſuch Repentance. Tho' good Education be a difficult Undertaking, and much diſus'd in theſe times of general licentiouſneſs, yet it is the moſt important Matter, that either the State, or the Church, can take into con-

ſideration, for the happineſs of the Kingdom, as well as the Salvation of Souls depends upon it. It may perhaps ſo happen, that after all our care, ſome may get looſe from the beſt Education, and run a wild courſe of folly and madneſs; yet I am perſwaded there are but few ſuch; and they who do, are commonly followed with ſuch quick Reflections, and ſharp Convictions of Conſcience, they are ſo haunted with the remains of their good Education, that they find but little quietneſs in their Souls, 'till they return to Wiſdom and Vertue; and perhaps the firſt ſevere Affliction brings them to themſelves again: So that ſtill the extravagance of moſt People is owing either to their want of Education, or to ſome great defects in it: Either their firſt Years were wholly neglected, and they were ſuffer'd to contract ill Habits, before they were committed to Inſtruction; or they were brought up under ſuch an Indiſcreet Strictneſs, and ſuch ſowreneſs of Principles and Opinions, as made Religion frightful to them; whereas the love of God, and the eaſineſs of Vertue, are chiefly to be inſtill'd into tender Minds, and that with all the ſweetneſs and endearments imaginable: or perhaps their faculties were made too Volatile and Trivial, with modiſh Diverſiſements, and they were taught more Vanity than

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Vertue in their younger Years; or else they were too soon committed to the wide World, before they were truly form'd into any settled Goodness, or had any Vertuous dispositions improv'd and establish'd in them.

O 'tis a Blessed thing to set out Innocently in the World, and to go on in a constant Progress of Holiness! To have only Surprizes and Infirmities to repent of, and some few Spots contracted in common Conversation to cleanse and wash away! And so to increase daily in Wisdom and Vertue and in Favour both with God and Man!

Tho' the returning Sinner may run up to a great measure of Goodness; yet in respect to the just Person, he will still be the hinder Wheel, and can never overtake him, who turns upon another Axle; and set out before him in the race of Vertue: Tho' the Penitent may have more heats of Zeal, and more Vehemency in Religion, yet 'tis very rarely that he equals the Just in the Regularity and Constancy of Duty: The one may sometimes more vigorously collect himself, and perform some things in Religion with more generosity and warmth, but then he is apt to languish again, and to cool too soon; but the other maintains his Piety with a calm, an even, and a gradual advancement.

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The Penitent may be admirably fitted to preach Repentance to others, to declare the riches of that Mercy which he himſelf has found, the poſſibility of overcoming evil habits which himſelf has laid aſide, and of recovering into a Life of Vertue after a long courſe in Sin: He may be admirably fitted to warn Men of the deceitfulneſs of Sin, of the falſeneſs of its promiſes, and of the danger of delaying their Amendment: But then the remembrance of his former Life will be apt to diminiſh his Reverence with ſome, and to leſſen the Force and Influence of his Counſels: But the Juſt may rebuke and reprove with all Authority, and his unſpotted Life will add weight and moment to his Words. He who has forfeited that free and compleat forgiveneſs that was diſpenſed in Baptiſm, and after a notorious range in Sin, is brought into the Church again at the penitential Door, will have reaſon to be continually working out his own Salvation with great fear and trembling: He will have many ſcars remaining after his Wounds are heal'd; he will hardly ever be free from ſome Images and Tracts of his former Vanity: He will be often in danger of a Relapſe: He will be apt to think himſelf more improv'd than really he is; becauſe he ſenſibly finds how much he is re-

remov'd from that Degenerate State in which he was; so that a little progress in Vertue, will go near to look like perfection to such an one, unless he more studiously compare his Life with the rules of the Gospel, than with those vicious practices which he has forsaken: Besides all this, an extravagant Life does seldom fail of leaving some indelible Prints behind it, some weaknesses either of Body or of Mind, that make the Convert less able to do any eminent service for God and Religion in the remaining part of his Life: And upon these accounts he can hardly expect to come to that full Peace and Comfort, and to that degree of humble Confidence and Assurance, which is the special privilege of the Just.

Tho' the good Father made an extraordinary Entertainment for the returning Prodigal; yet he told the elder Brother, that he was ever with him, and that all he had was his: That he had command of all his Substance, and all the Riches of his House were his.

Those Divine Vouchsafements, which are a Feast, and a surprizing Joy to the Penitent, are but the daily Provisions, but the common Experiences of the Just.

A return from a vicious Life is more moving, and causes more admiration; but a setled course

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of Goodness is more valuable, and is entertained with a more lasting Esteem.

Nothing besides Innocence is better than Repentance, and a timely Repentance comes very near to Innocence. The penitent Person by his return, causes a Joy in Heaven; but the Just has a great Measure of that Heaven continually within him.

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